

Comparative Media Systems

COM 420 / POL S 468 / SIS 419

World Information Access Report – 2009
Fall 2009

Tuesday and Thursday, 11:30 – 1:20
Room #302 Communications Building

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Office Hours Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30-11:20 and by appointment

Course Content

This is a course about how information and communication technologies (ICTs) are used to help solve social problems in developing countries. Students will be involved in original research through a group project—publication of content for the World Information Access Project web site (www.wiareport.org). This year's publication will be the third annual report on ICT distribution within *and* between countries. Coursework is centered around the production of this report, which will include comparative data tables and chapters on key countries, global cities, and themes of interest to the students. This class is all about researching and writing in teams, so if you already know you do not like team projects, do not take this class.

At times the class will be run like a workshop; at times the class will be run like a newsroom. The class has several specific goals:

- to understand the role of new media communication tools in local, national, and regional development;
- to understand core development theories of modernization, dependency and underdevelopment;
- to apply the comparative method, critical theories of development, and team learning skills through group projects.

By the end of the class, students will be able to

- design a small research project;
- collect data, assess its quality, and manage it using a spreadsheet program;
- manage real working relationships under tight deadlines.

Students are encouraged to share their critical insights on development and communication so as to help all of us understand specific theoretical questions about the relationship between cultures, communication and development. Although this course has no formal

prerequisites, students with life experience overseas, or coursework in communication, international studies, or political science will be best prepared for the pace and expectations of this course.

Teaching Method

Much of the class time will be spent working in teams, and the composition of these teams will change as we move through different phases of gathering data, creating table and text content, and promoting our findings. We will often talk about current events in class, so you should start listening for news items related to the topic of ICT and development. Each class will probably start off with people sharing relevant clippings or news stories read (New York Times, Wall Street Journal and Economist Magazine recommended) or heard (NPR or BBC recommended) during the week. During some classes, we will spend time collectively searching for data or writing for collective stories.

In a typical class, you will be making phone calls, hunting for data online, building spreadsheets, or writing short summaries of important trends. This class has almost no required reading, but students will still be expected to work about 10 hours per week on our project. Class time will provide 4 hours a week to for meetings with your group, editing each other's work, and conferring with the instructor. The other 6 hours a week will be spent hunting for data online, doing phone interviews, and writing up your findings. This is a service education class where the goal is to learn about how information technologies are used to solve social problems in developing countries, and to produce a research resource for journalists, development practitioners, and the public.

Methods of Evaluation

There are no quizzes, mid-term exams or final exams in this course. The final grade will be determined by successful authorship credit for two data memos, successful completion of code sheets designed by principal investigators, an external evaluation of our content, and a participation review by both the instructor and your peers. You must be identified as a "Principle Investigator" on at least one project.

Component	Points
Participation Review From Peers	100
Participation Review From Instructor	60
Data Gathering Exercises	70
Data Memo 1	50
Data Memo 2	80
External Evaluation (Shared Grade)	40
Total	400

The peer evaluations will be run every two weeks, and each person will evaluate the people they have been working with. Students will be responsible for generating content ideas during our meetings, for collecting and analyzing data, for constructing the web site, for publicizing our research findings, and for representing our project to the public. Some stories may be dropped for lack of data or writing quality, but you will still be credited for trying. E-mail will be used to conduct class business and carry on debates outside of class time. E-mail will often be used to distribute the data gathering exercises.

[[In the spirit of H1N1, the following will be taken lightly in 2009.]] Since irregular attendance will disrupt our learning community and a portion of the grade comes from peer review, absences will affect your grade. Attendance will be monitored, and since demand his high for admission to this class, absences may also result in your spot being given to another student. Exceptions will only be made for medical reasons, and you will need a doctor's note.

There will be an evaluation of our report at the end of the quarter by an outside panel of experts in development communication. This committee will review our deliverables, and their assessment will help determine everyone's final grade. In other words, if the whole website's content and presentation earns us a 38, then that grade will contribute to every student's overall grade. Early in the quarter, students as a group will define the standards by which they want their project graded by the external reviewers.

Several of the data memos will generate public buzz beyond our classroom. If your writing style impedes our ability to understand your arguments or embarrasses the University of Washington your grade will suffer, so it is a good idea to have your colleagues proofread your writing. Use William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style* (New York: Macmillan, 1979) for writing style questions. The University of Washington has a number of resources to help with writing style, and they are described online at <http://depts.washington.edu/uwrite/>. Howard Becker's *Writing for Social Sciences* also has advice on developing good writing habits. Citations should be formatted according to the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Please refer to the University of Washington's "Principles Regarding Academic Integrity" for the definitions and consequences of plagiarism. The results of the research will go live on the website,

Lab Fees

You do not need to purchase books or course packs for this class. There will be small expenses associated with the work we will be doing in this class, however it is difficult to know what these will be until we have developed some research questions. In the past, expenses have included the cost of long distance phone calls to India, software subscriptions to online services, and purchasing used copies of the Lonely Planet from Amazon.com. You should be prepared to spend \$50 in support of your research projects.